

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

080739Z Sep 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001398

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAYE
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENANDER
DOC FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE PASS EX-IM FOR JRICHTER AND KVRANICH
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND JEDWARDS
STATE PASS TDA FOR NCABOT AND BTERNET

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EPET](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN LABOR CONGRESS CONTINUES TO RESTRATEGIZE

REF: A) LAGOS 1397 B) LAGOS 1377 C) LAGOS 1376 D-)

LAGOS 1350

Summary

1. (U) With its sights diverted from a national strike for the time being, the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) is organizing a series of rallies designed, at the very least, to get GON agreement to rebuild four non-operational refineries and to commit to full deregulation of the petroleum industry. They blame the GON for employing a "divide and conquer" strategy toward labor unions and continue to assert their role as labor sector leader. End Summary.

NLC Ploy: Labor Rallies to Gather
Grass Roots Support for Strike

2. (SBU) After deciding to organize nation-wide rallies instead of a strike, NLC officials explained, in pro forma fashion, the rallies would allow them to gather grass roots support for a strike they still believe is in the offing. In addition to the nine cities mentioned in ref A, the NLC is organizing a rally in Abuja in front of the National Assembly building. This last rally will occur in October with the active help of some National Assembly members. At each venue, the NLC will sponsor speakers at a preplanned location and then continue the protests with marches through the city. In Lagos, for instance, the NLC will begin activities either in Ikeja or Yaba, two suburbs, and then send their mobile platform throughout the rest of the city. State chapters of NLC have also been asked to hold independent rallies, and the NLC has gotten commitments from the Anambra, Rivers, and Kwara state headquarters to hold rallies.

NLC Changes Strategy to Broaden Appeal

3. (SBU) So far, a nine-member committee has been making decisions as to how labor should proceed. The committee consists of a representative from the NLC, the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the Congress of Free Trade Unions (CFTU), and six civil society organizations. Denja Yaqub, NLC Assistant Secretary, explained the NLC had problems delineating the

SIPDIS

parameters of the strike with the civil society organizations. According to him, these organizations desired to cut off contact with government during the strike and to brandish signs demanding the resignation of the current government. NLC's position, of course, was much less radical and would have to appeal to all groups as a whole.

4. (SBU) Yaqub said some people wanted the strike to have focused strictly on fuel prices, but NLC demands were far more extensive. He listed several goals the NLC hoped to achieve: compensation for over 75,000 civil service employees in the process of being released; total deregulation of the petroleum sector while still maintaining subsidies; and new anti-corruption measures. On the last front, Yaqub said the NLC wanted to redirect funds earmarked for the presidential library in Abeokuta to the repair of four oil refineries. He said they would ask for a review of all government staff, claiming many government workers had no actual work but were on the payroll as friends of important people. (Comment. The claim to want deregulation of the petroleum sector while maintaining subsidies is casuistry. The essence of deregulation is the departure of subsidies. For the NLC official to speak of the coexistence of both was to speak with a bifurcated tongue. End Comment.)

NLC Clashes with Government Over Tactics, Goals

15. (SBU) The NLC met officials from the Ministries of Labor and Finance and from the Petroleum Products Pricing Regulation Agency (PPPRA) Tuesday, September 6. NLC characterized the meeting as a "waste." They stated the N7 billion package offered primarily to increase mass transit capacity throughout the states of Nigeria was simply a regurgitation of Mantu Committee recommendations accepted last year. The NLC ended the meeting saying no further negotiations would be possible without the direct appearance of the President.

16. (SBU) Yaqub noted the GON originally requested to meet the NLC September 5, after the NLC had announced it would be meeting that same day with other labor organizations. In addition, he said the GON continues to "play politics" with the TUC by delaying its full recognition as a second central labor organization in order to maintain leverage over the TUC at this sensitive moment. Yaqub boasted the NLC has over 4 million members, while TUC membership was around 1 million. He also gave little credence to the idea that the TUC could command a position as representative of senior workers (reftel), explaining Nigerian workers are finding that senior and junior level concerns are similar and can be handled through the same organization. He summed up GON's current dealings with various labor organizations as consummate "divide and conquer" tactics.

Comment

17. (SBU) Yaqub's insistence that NLC changed strategy on its own accord does not jibe with information reported in ref A regarding reactions of other labor organizations. Yaqub's assessment of the NLC's strength may be a bit too roseate and biased. He continues to cling to hopes of a strike and was quick to stress NLC's leadership of civil society organizations and its size relative to other labor bodies. Whatever the cause, NLC's quick move to softpedal the strike and to adapt to the opinions of other labor organizations indicates that the NLC does not have organizational strength or public backing to unilaterally call the shots. It must work in concert with groups that are both more moderate (other labor organizations) and more militant (some civil society groups) than the NLC. End Comment.
BROWNE